

Istook Says Trolley is High in Cost, Low in Passengers -- Doesn't Support Federal Funding

Questions City's \$13 Million Request Paid for by U.S. Taxpayers

Washington, D.C. - Congressman Ernest Istook (R-Okla.) says he does not support Oklahoma City's request for \$13 million in federal money to build a new fixed-rail trolley loop on the streets of downtown Oklahoma City. Istook says the proposal is high in cost but would be low in passengers, because official projections show only 640-750 people per day would use the multi-million dollar system. He said the project is not cost-justified and is not a proper use of federal taxpayers' money under the guise of "mass transit." Istook indicated the ridership would be only 1/20th the size of any other federally-funded mass transit system of which he is aware.

Istook suggested that instead the city bus system could provide trolley-style buses to run the 2.7-mile loop, for only a small fraction of the estimated \$22 million cost of the rail system. He noted that the city has already chosen to use the trolley-style buses for routes coming into downtown. Those buses, he said, would also be much more flexible, because their routes would not be permanently confined to where expensive rail tracks were added to the downtown streets. Using the buses would also eliminate almost all of the proposed cost, he noted, which is mostly for the capital expense of installing rails in the streets of downtown, buying rail trolleys, and building a special center to maintain them.

"Too often, when a project is questionable or makes no economic sense, the federal taxpayers are asked and expected to pay for it, and are then stuck with the bill," stated Istook. **"I cannot in good conscience speak out and oppose waste on federal projects in other states and cities, if I ignore it in Oklahoma. Following a double standard preserves the system which has created our deficit and huge national debt."**

Istook also noted that the trolley rail system is projected to lose over \$300,000 a year in operating expenses, and that new city taxes have been suggested to pay for that shortfall. The system would never be expected to break even, said Istook, because the number of passengers is expected to decrease over the next 20 years (according to the official feasibility study of the trolley project, as provided by local officials).

Istook made his comments in a letter to Frank Wolf (R-VA), Chairman of the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Transportation, the committee that funds federal transportation.

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